

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION  
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THE SENATE ARMED  
SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**STATEMENT  
OF  
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HEADQUARTERS, UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS  
BEFORE THE  
PERSONNEL SUBCOMMITTEE  
OF THE  
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE  
ON  
ISSUES AFFECTING MILITARY FAMILIES  
2 JUNE 2003**

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Chairman Chambliss, Senator Nelson, and Members of the Subcommittee:

It is a distinct pleasure to have this opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the services that the Marine Corps provides to families of deployed Marines. Taking care of our own is one of the Corps' abiding principles and you can be confident that those responsible for "taking care of Marines and their families"--at home or away--are not confused as to their mission or the importance of what they do--this is integral to the Marine culture.

As an expeditionary force, we are accustomed to providing extended support. Approximately 76,150 Marines were deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), of this number 2,098 active duty and 893 Reservists were from Georgia. While we are the youngest, most junior, and least married of the four military services, the Marine Corps has approximately the same number of family members as active duty personnel. The Marine Corps possesses a strong community support backbone that is well established at our major bases and stations to support these family members. We serve the needs of Marines and families at home and away through an organizational construct that combines MWR, exchanges, family services, and voluntary education under a single leadership structure called Marine Corps Community Services (MCCS). MCCS is a combined arms community support organization that offers a diverse and expansive capability from which to draw personal and family readiness support. The single leadership structure of MCCS allows the commander to cut across previous program stovepipes. Removing the barrier and burden of stovepipes has allowed our commanders greater flexibility and encouraged development of true community-based interventions, programs or services. Installation commanders continuously gauge community service levels from which informed decisions are made to respond to changing needs. MCCS is easily adaptable to serve the mobility requirements of an expeditionary force.

Marine Corps Family Team Building within MCCC is the headquarters element that provides plans, policy, and resources for the programs executed on installations.

### **SUPPORTING MARINE CORPS FAMILIES**

The challenges of the military lifestyle such as relocation, transition, and deployments are soothed by the comforts and familiarity of hometown, USA support. Our MWR activities provide that reminder of home and family, and wholesome fun. This is particularly important during periods of deployment when so much is uncertain and separation causes anxiety for the Marine's family members. During deployments, Marine families bear the burden of waiting but also the added responsibility of keeping the family together and functioning as normally as possible. This is a big job, but help is available.

At each of our bases or stations, the Key Volunteer Network (KVN) Program serves as the official communication link between the deployed command and the families. Additionally, the Lifestyle Insights, Networking, Knowledge and Skills (L.I.N.K.S.) Program is offered to new Marine spouses to acquaint them with the military lifestyle and the Marine Corps, including the challenges brought about by frequent deployments. We are hearing great things from our deployed commanding officers as units begin to arrive home from OIF regarding the necessity of this family readiness support while they were away and as part of their homecoming. Other support that is offered to families of deployed Marines includes assisting in developing proactive, prevention oriented plans such as family care plans, powers of attorney, family financial planning, and enrollment in the Dependent Eligibility and Enrollment Reporting System (DEERS). The Family Readiness Officer and the support structure within the Marine Corps Family Team Building team play a key role in this area. Additional services are provided

to those who need assistance coping with separation or desire specialized support such as spiritual guidance, coping and social skills, or just a caring listener.

We are very proud to be the Department of Defense (DOD) pilot for implementation of an employee assistance program, which became available to the total Marine Corps force by February 1 and has been very helpful for families over the last few months. *MCCS One Source* is a 24/7, 365 day per year information and referral service designed to reach both active duty and reserve families wherever they may be located. It can be accessed anytime via toll free numbers, email or the Internet. By offering round-the-clock information and referral services, we greatly expanded the support services previously offered aboard installations to Marines and their family members, and particularly for reserve families who are often located away from bases and installations. *MCCS One Source* support areas include parenting and child care, education services, financial information and advice, legal, elder care, health and wellness, crisis support, and relocation. We're excited about the reality of extended support capabilities and how this contributes to the well being of Marines and their families.

### **All Information All the Time...**

One of the lessons that became quite apparent in the early days of OIF was the need for immediate information as a result of the so-called "CNN effect." With a 24-hour news cycle complete with embedded reporters, an immediate need for information became the expected norm. We realized that it was no longer sufficient just to provide updates to the "traditional" dependents such as the spouse through the 1-800 numbers or the Key Volunteer Network as we had in the past. The already-established East and West Coast 1-800 family assistance hotlines at Camp Lejeune and Camp Pendleton were expanded and operated 24/7 to provide information and referral services related to deployed Marines. In April, Headquarters Marine Corps

established the OIF Family Information Line to provide one phone number to concerned family members and the general public with the East and West Coast hotlines and weblinks to the Marine Corps and the MCCS website for the latest news about deployed Marines. By mid-April, the East and West Coast hotlines were receiving an average of 150-300 calls per day from spouses, parents, other relatives, and friends of deployed Marines. In addition to these hotlines, special deployment support links were built on Marine Corps web sites, many deployed units had their own toll free numbers that the commander could update from the field with information for the families back at home, and Single Marine Programs at each installation were provided with templates on how best to keep the parents of single Marines updated.

### **The Children...**

One of the family members that can be overlooked during deployments is the child. The Marine Corps' Children, Youth and Teen program provides installations with overall guidance in providing childcare and during deployments, helps them to meet the needs of spouses with expanded hours of care and other programs designed for children. In addition to the child care needs during a deployment, there are 1.5 million school-aged children of active duty, reserve and National Guard families attending schools not affiliated with the Department of Defense. Skilled educators, counselors and mental health workers associated with the public schools attended by military children generally do not have an awareness of the lifestyle, issues or challenges of the military child. To be optimally effective, they must be trained in military child issues and appropriate interventions. The Marine Corps was pleased that the Department partnered with the Department of Education's Safe and Drug Free Schools so that the services could work with the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (sponsored by UCLA, Duke University and the Department of Health and Human Services) to develop information booklets such as: An

Educator's Guide to the Military Child During Deployment; An Educator's Guide to the Military Child During Post Deployment; and Challenges of Family Reunion.

Another family program that can be especially helpful during times of deployment is the New Parent Support Program (NPSP). The NPSP is a prevention program to enhance family readiness through education and support of families with children from newborn to six years of age. Parenting skill classes, home visits, support groups and referrals for additional services are provided. Classes and home visits for a new parent who is alone as a result of a deployment can be very reassuring. In FY 2002 19,000 parents attended NPSP classes, 11,000 families received home visitations.

The Marine Corps received \$700,000 in supplemental funding for children and youth initiatives in support of OEF and associated contingency operations. As of May 1, we have distributed approximately \$470,000 of those funds for respite care, extended child care hours, child care during deployment briefs, and deployment training materials geared for children. The Marine Corps is meeting DOD's intent for the supplemental funding and is aggressively pursuing further execution of the funds in support of Marines and their families.

### **Community Support**

Local communities outside our installations' gates are significantly impacted by Marine deployments. Beyond expected sales and revenue declines experienced by local businesses, Marines and family members often immerse themselves in the local community by volunteering as coaches, scout leaders, fire fighters, etc. For this reason, local businesses or community service organizations feel very connected to the Marines and their families and want to help. At Camp Lejeune where over half of the troops were deployed at one time, MCCS is working with the Chamber of Commerce and the local community on *Project CARE* which seeks to match

military families with services in the local community. *Project Enduring Families* are partnerships between MCCA and the communities surrounding Twentynine Palms and Miramar that are working to help families maintain daily routines and stay connected to the community. Some other examples of MCCA activities during this current deployment include: provision of more varied and flexible child care options; respite care; special events for families; free postage and packing (up to 10 pounds) of gift items for deployed troops; and offering deployed spouses free tire repairs at the Exchange Service Station.

### **The Challenges of Providing Support**

Perhaps one of the most challenging times to provide support to families is after the death of a beloved Marine. As we worked with families to help them handle a death as a result of OEF or OIF, we realized that current policy sometimes was outdated and inadequate. The Department of Defense worked quickly with Congress and the Services to address needed changes as we became aware of the additional support these grieving families needed. Certainly one of the challenges we have faced during OIF involved the “CNN effect” and balancing the public’s need for instant information with the military casualty assistance process and the family’s needs. Chairman, as you are well aware and have addressed in S. 783 with Senator Miller, the process of applying and funding posthumous citizenship requests from the families of fallen Marines was another issue for families like that of Corporal Jose Garibay and Lance Corporal Jose Gutierrez. In the absence of statute or policy that allowed for automatic application, our casualty assistance calls officers were provided with the information to help families that wished to apply for posthumous citizenship and Dr. Chu worked with other federal agencies involved in the citizenship process to waive the required fees. A third area of increased support as a result of the war supplemental was the ability to pay per diem to those families traveling to the bedside of a

Marine wounded in OEF or OIF. We appreciate the willingness of Congress and the Department of Defense to quickly address issues such as these that help us better serve Marines and their families in times of need.

## **RETURN AND REUNION**

One of the most rewarding experiences program managers enjoy is the opportunity to work with Marine families during homecoming preparations and celebrations. Deployments are a constant reality for Marines, Sailors, and their families and while homecomings are a time of love and joy, they can also present significant challenges for all, regardless of age, experience, or length of service. As Marines return and reunite with their families, they require adequate preparation and support services to ease the transition from the battlefield to the home. As important as this transition is for the returning Marine, it is equally important for the family members.

In recognition of the importance of the transition home for both Marines and their families, the Marine Corps developed a standardized return and reunion program developed in coordination with MCCS personnel, health professionals, and chaplains. The program consists of a mandatory warrior transition brief for the returning Marine, a return and reunion guidebook for Marines and family members, a caregiver brief, and briefs designed for spouses. The Commandant recently outlined the steps in this important program for all Marines in ALMAR #032/03 and to commanders in White Letter #03-03. Return and reunion presentations for family members are being made abundantly available and marketed to family members (spouses, children, and significant others) aboard receiving installations and at appropriate reserve locations as early as 30 days prior to the return of units. The information used by command leaders, family readiness officers, and Marine Corps Family Team Building staff organizes the



topics according to perspective: single Marines and their significant others, married Marines and their spouses, Marines with children, single parent Marines, and reservists going back to civilian jobs. In addition to the travel-size copy of the guidebook provided to all Marines prior to their departure from the theater of operations, guidebooks are available on-line to installation staff and family members at home. Guidebooks cover issues like: return as a process requiring time and effort, managing expectations and staying flexible, reunion as a single parent, reunion and marriage, children, and work. Tips for a successful homecoming are also included.

Key Volunteer Networks are critical in passing the word regarding the availability and scheduling of return and reunion briefings for spouses, identification of supportive information and resources, and helping in making referrals for families for follow-on support as needed. The brief for caregivers, “Caring for the Caregivers”, is available on-line for installation staff and command representatives to offer to Key Volunteers and spouses who have been particularly challenged in support of the units during the deployment. This is a 3-hour facilitated discussion to decompress those who have remained strong to care for others in crisis.

## **CONCLUSION**

Mr. Chairman, taking care of Marines and their families is a cultivated, point of pride of the Marine Corps; it is part of our ethos. Our continuum of care begins with the “yellow footprints” and continues throughout the life of a Marine. Marines are Marines for life. Legendary hallmarks of “Once a Marine...always a Marine” and “Semper Fi” prove our long-term commitment and provide convincing testimony from Marines that they are forever changed and a part of a “society” that is sustained through self-perpetuation and a shared culture. Taking care of the families of Marines during deployments is a vital part of that culture. Family

readiness leads to mission readiness and is just one way that the Corps and the Nation say thank you for the sacrifices these families make.

We would like to thank this Subcommittee and the Congress as a whole for the unwavering support you provide to our men and women in uniform and their families. Marines and their families are worthy of your time and attention. They perform a great service for this Nation and deserve a quality of life that recognizes that commitment. Your ongoing support will make it possible for MCCS to continue to provide the type of programs and services for our Marines and their families that make it easier for Marines to serve our Nation in every corner of the world and for their families to continue to support them.

Subject to your questions, Mr. Chairman, this concludes my remarks.